

Taking lock, stock, barrel

Tues 1-22-13

LA Times

Deputies trade gift cards for weapons in a buyback program at a Compton parking lot.

BY LAURA J. NELSON

As cars snaked through a series of orange cones in a Compton parking lot, five shopping carts slowly filled with rifles and assault weapons. Nearby, plastic produce crates overflowed with handguns, spare gun parts and ammunition magazines.

The weapons and accessories came from a gun buyback program held Monday by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the agency's first such effort since 2009. Deputies sweated under unseasonably warm temperatures as they lifted weapons out of car trunks and truck beds and chalked the weapons' value on each windshield. Volunteers emptied magazines and threaded zip ties through barrels.

More than an hour before the buyback was scheduled to start, 15 cars waited. By 5 p.m., deputies had collected 386 weapons, including 193 rifles, 144 handguns and 22 assault rifles. Those who turned in the weapons left with \$50 in gift cards in exchange for gun parts and non-working guns; \$100 for handguns, shotguns and ri-

[See Guns, AA4]

Sheriff's Department holds gun buyback in Compton

Tues 1-22-13 LA Times

[Guns, from AA1] fles; and up to \$200 for assault weapons.

"You just never know what you're going to get," Det. Fernando Gonzales said, lifting a shotgun out of a car trunk and examining a sawed-off barrel. "No good has ever come from this one."

The buyback was the second in as many months in L.A. County. In late December, the Los Angeles Police Department collected 2,037 firearms at a similar buyback, including 75 assault weapons and two rocket launchers. Both buybacks follow increased concern about gun safety in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Conn., that left 27 dead, including the gunman.

The Sheriff Department's buyback program began in 2005 and continued annually until 2009, when it

'You just never know what you're going to get. No good has ever come from this one.'

— FERNANDO GONZALES,

sheriff's detective, referring to a sawed-off shotgun at the Compton gun buyback

was put on hold during a round of budget cuts. This year's program was planned in less than two weeks, and netted fewer weapons than in the past. The biggest year on record was 2008, when deputies collected 1,267 firearms during a two-day week-end event.

Although 27 of the 31

homicides in Compton in 2012 involved a firearm, holding the buyback in the city didn't mean the department was specifically calling on its residents to bring in guns, Sheriff Lee Baca said. Indeed, the community — which traditionally has had a reputation for violence and gang activity — has seen its overall violent crime rate fall 15% in the last five years.

John West, 64, traded in a rusted revolver and a Derringer pistol from his gun safe. West said he keeps at least 15 guns at home in Fullerton, including a semiautomatic that he keeps for self-defense. He shoots it regularly to stay in practice.

Some brought BB guns and toy pistols. Others, semiautomatic rifles engraved in Chinese and Russian. A few relatives brought inherited weapons, including a World War II-era Italian pistol, still in its case, and a

replica of a black powder Civil War pistol.

"I had no idea what to do with it," said Wilmer Abram, 89, of San Pedro, who arrived with a 2-inch Smith & Wesson pistol that he inherited from his nephew. "I certainly don't want it."

Jose Ramirez dropped off a Russian-made semiautomatic rifle that he bought in the 1990s in exchange for a \$200 Ralphs gift card. Since purchasing the rifle, he married and had five children.

"At this point in my life, I'd rather have groceries," Ramirez said, as two of his kids giggled in the back seat. "We don't need that risk."

The Sheriff's Department will destroy the guns in July at its annual weapons meltdown. The steel will be used for rebar, road construction and art installations called "peace angels."

laura.nelson@latimes.com

Board tangles

with WED 1-23-13
sheriff LA 11m

By ROBERT FATURECHI

Los Angeles County supervisors Tuesday said Sheriff Lee Baca's suspension of deputy overtime has dramatically reduced patrol operations and jeopardized public safety.

In a contentious meeting of the Board of Supervisors, Baca was attacked for ignoring the needs of unincorporated parts of the county in favor of cities that contract with his department for police services. They said his overtime cuts were disproportionately affecting unincorporated neighborhoods. Supervisor Gloria Molina went so far as to accuse Baca of "stealing" police resources from residents in those areas.

"I object to that," Baca responded.

"And I object to your stealing," Molina shot back. "Stealing is over the top," supervisor, Baca replied. "How can you say something

[See Sheriff, A12] 4:44p
0 40 News
1000

Baca, supervisors spar over cuts

WED 1-23-13 LA 11m

jumped 3%.

[Sheriff, from A11] That is so outrageous that is not worth the dignity of your office?"

Baca said it was unrealistic for the supervisors to expect him to provide the same level of police services when they have made major cuts to his budget in recent years. "Let's be real about the numbers of our county budget," Baca said. "We're at a crisis... If you don't have the money, you just don't have

the money." According to Baca's spokesman, the sheriff's budget — now at \$2.8 billion — was cut by the board by \$128 million in 2010, \$96 million in 2011 and \$140 million last year.

Despite those cuts, Baca pointed out that "we have the lowest crime rate we've had in 40 years."

Although the homicide rate is at a historic low, recently released sheriff's statistics show serious crime did increase 4.2% last year and all types of crime

Baca and his predecessors have long wrangled with the board over budgetary matters. Although the board sets the department's budget, Baca, an elected official, has wide discretion on how to spend it.

The Sheriff's Department polices about three-fourths of the county. Along with the unincorporated areas, Baca's deputies patrol more than 40 cities within the county that don't have their own police forces.

The patrol obligations for those cities are set in contracts with the department, so overtime cuts are more likely to hurt unincorporated areas, the supervisors argued.

Baca said his decision this month to suspend all overtime came when he noticed a spike in such expenditures. His spokesman said Baca had to make the temporary cut to ensure that he would meet his budget at the end of the fiscal

year.

The cuts are already having an effect, supervisors said. In Valinda and Basset — neighborhoods in the San Gabriel Valley — more than five sheriff's cars were patrolling during a typical evening, but now there are only two, supervisors said. Unincorporated areas of Azusa, Claremont and Pomona have also been affected — losing one patrol car on average during early morning shifts.

Molina, who shouted Baca down more than once during the hearing, said she was considering commissioning "independent private patrol cars" to replace cuts in sheriff's patrols — a suggestion Baca discouraged.

Molina said Baca should make cuts in other department functions, not patrols, to cope with his reduced budget.

robert.faturechi@latimes.com

Fri 1-18-13 Daily Breeze

Miscommunication or dishonesty: Story of Gardena mayor's race unclear

GARDENA Mayor Paul Tanaka's latest explanation as to why he's not actively campaigning for a third term — even though his name remains on the ballot — raises more questions than answers.

Either there's a serious case of miscommunication among Gardena's city leaders or someone is not being completely honest about how the candidates came to decide on running for mayor for the March 5 municipal election.

During a discussion this week with members of the newspaper's editorial board, Tanaka said he was manipulated by his competitor, Gardena Councilwoman Rachel Johnson. That's a complete turnaround from a letter Tanaka issued earlier this month, declaring his support for Johnson.

"I'm the victim, not the suspect," said Tanaka, who works as undersheriff of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Tanaka said he was done with politics and did not want to tackle the burden of campaigning and raising funds for another election. He gave a believable and sincere story about wanting to leave City Hall to concentrate on his day job and on his 3-year-old son.

But the story takes a few strange turns from there. Tanaka said he repeatedly asked Johnson if she was

interested in running for mayor, and she said "she didn't want it," Tanaka said.

Tanaka stood by earlier statements that he filed candidacy papers for a third term as mayor because it appeared none of his colleagues on the City Council was interested in replacing him.

The only problem is, Gardena Councilmen Ronald Ikejiri and Dan Medina — both of whom accompanied Tanaka to the editorial board meeting — said they would have run for mayor if they knew Tanaka would bow out of the race. Both men said they wanted to avoid an uphill battle against an incumbent.

So then why didn't Tanaka encourage them to run? Or did he? Or was there some sort of miscommunication? The answers still aren't clear.

Now that the nomination filing period has passed, Medina has launched a write-in campaign for mayor. Ikejiri is sitting out the race. And Tanaka said he will not actively campaign, but he will serve if he ends up winning.

Confused? So are we. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered in the remaining six weeks before the election. In the meantime, Gardena's registered voters have until Feb. 19 to mount an official write-in campaign for mayor. Interested outsiders should do so.